











Without the vision and support of Citipost Mail, we would not have been able to bring 'A New Narrative for Print' to life.

They are dedicated to supporting the print industry to thrive in the long-term and the team's expertise and experience has ensured the success of this project.



Brendan Perring
General Manager, IPIA



### A New Narrative for Print

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### **Foreword**

The primary aim of the IPIA's ground-breaking national print research and advocacy project is to positively shift the perception of print among UK consumers and businesses across a range of critical factors – with the goal of stimulating growth in demand for our industry's products and services.

Citipost Mail's support, expertise and vision are fundamental to the success of this endeavour and achieving its long-term goals.

The research was conducted in partnership with world-leading communications agency Madano, which has mapped perceptions of the UK print industry across a range of key metrics using its specialist data science technology and analysis tools.

Studying more than 12,000 online conversations across social media, media outlets, blogs and forums – the study has also identified key influencers who significantly sway the perception of the print industry and its products. Madano also analysed the dominant narratives in the conversation around print.

By obtaining an accurate picture of how the print industry and its products are perceived – and by identifying the most influential individuals and organisations driving these perceptions – the IPIA and its partners can develop a long-term strategy to strengthen the print market in the UK.

Ultimately, by increasing the positive perception of print's effectiveness, sustainability and positive contribution to society, the result will be an uplift in both businesses and consumers utilising print as a marketing and communications medium.



Alasdair Browne
Vice Chair: IPIA
Chair Research Subcommittee







# Knowledge is power



### Mention print and it conjures many images and reactions.

For marketers; maybe a sales brochure or point-of-sale, for designers; reproducing sharp lines and images on paper, or if you are a screen print fan; perhaps a garment emblazoned with an image that expresses your style. For photographers; a glossy image which captures a moment in time.

Whatever you think about print, the uncomfortable truth is that for an increasing number of professionals tasked with marketing and selling their company's products, print is not the 'go to' medium when they start thinking of their next communications strategy.

Print is still very much present in our lives; so why does it appear increasingly absent in the thinking and decision making of consumers and business professionals?

It is a question the IPIA has been asking for some time. Setting out to understand the role print plays in our lives was tackled by commissioning research undertaken in 2024 by Madano, on behalf of the IPIA and steered by a group of influential industry stakeholders, including **Citipost Mail**.

By understanding more about the dialogue businesses and end-users engage with about print, and importantly, where those conversations originate and why they matter, will lead a transformation for the future of the print industry.

With new insight into behaviours and understanding, the IPIA has set in motion a strategic direction for print industries in the UK.

It's time to start a new narrative about print.



### Taking stock

### We've been assessing the market place.

The place of print in our lives is one of permanence, trust and is part of the digital growth of 'UK plc'. As an industry, it is the aim to drive the positive position and place of print.

Conversations are challenging when we consider the sale, procurement and effectiveness of print; the way we influence creative industries with digital first print solutions, or the ability to produce exceptional materials. Getting to the heart of what influences the views of our target markets – and why they make specific choices when it comes to which communications and marketing channels they use – is critical to understand the path ahead.

Capturing the topics driving conversations has led to a greater comprehension of how clients, customers and consumers discuss, react, feel and importantly act on print. Assessing the positive and negative sentiment across a broad range of sectors also revealed critical insights and opportunities to grow the demand for the print industry's products and services.

Before diving directly into the data and analysis generated by our research partner Madano, and how these insights can be leveraged to affect a long-term positive narrative shift for the UK print industry, it is important to understand the backdrop of why undertaking this project is so critical.

- As an industry, we often speak in defence of print challenging its traditional position against other media.
- The print industry drives and develops incredible innovation, and findings show we are 'talking to ourselves' about what's possible and not breaking through to the right audiences.
- The industry is desperate to show print is better than digital advertising or other forms of communication, rather than how it might work to enhance the effectiveness of those mediums.
- Print can struggle to cut through and demonstrate why print is
   effective to those who should see our medium as a viable and engaging route to market.
- Print needs and wants to show how sustainable a medium this is, but faces significant, louder reasons of why this is a challenging
- idea or concept, even when the industry has better proof than other routes to market.





### The right questions

We could shrug our shoulders and say 'it's just how it is'.

Or we can get to the very root cause of what is really driving the conversation with customers and consumers and instigate a shift change.

To extend the thinking, a range of critical questions were devised to feed research agency Madano's data acquisition and analysis engine so they could examine print and its perception among UK consumers and businesses.

What is the level of conversation and general awareness of print out in target print buying markets and amongst consumers?

What is the perception of print's effectiveness when used within a multi-channel marketing campaign?

What is really influencing and motivating business to choose – or not – print when they consider their marketing methods?

What is the view of digital and mainstream media's effectiveness as a marketing and communications medium?

What is the level of awareness about career opportunities within the sector and its status as an advanced technology-driven industry?

What is the true perception of print's sustainability, measurability and its ROI?

What is the status of trust when it comes to printed media vs digital?



We have also examined wider supporting research and evidence to reinforce the argument that strong leadership from industry bodies and stakeholders, such as the IPIA and Citipost Mail, is necessary to tackle the gap between the perception of the print sector and its reality.

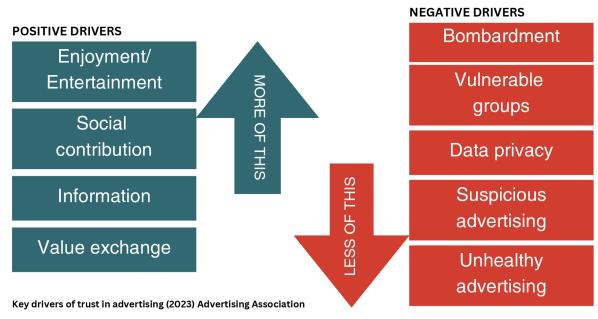


### Do we trust what we see?

### At the heart of any communication channel is trust.

With more emphasis on cutting cost, digital channels may appear to provide a more cost-effective solution. A rise in scam advertising and distrust of digital advertising has led to numerous campaigns by leading think tanks such as Credos¹to release studies on the impact of trust in advertising.

A long-term study by the Advertising Association has tracked consumer trust sentiment over time. The study which had tracked advertising as 'least trusted' when measured against healthcare, banking, telecoms, government and media, finally showed an uptick in 2024. Whilst 46% of those surveyed expressed the view that advertising had a positive impact, 42% agreed well placed advertising could make the world a better place.





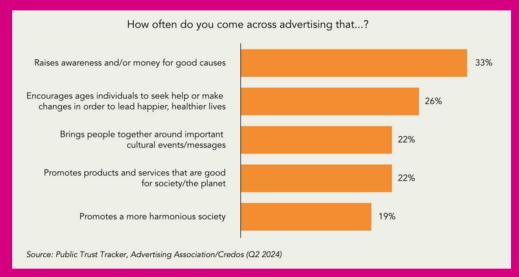
When taking into account age and attitudes to trust, 40% of under 34-year-olds trust advertising messages, with 50% of 18-34 year olds believing advertising can drive positive social change. In contrast, only 22% of over 55-year-olds say they trust advertising.

<sup>1</sup> Credos: *Drivers of public trust in advertising research (2023, 2024)* 2 Advertising Association: *The Value of Trust (2024)* 

### The industry's part in growing trust



Where a lack of trust exists, print plays an important part to both provide a physical connection and reassurance for the recipient. We know advertising plays an central role in changing hearts and minds. Over 34% of consumers surveyed for the Advertising Association Social Contribution report released in July 2024, stated advertising has had an impact on the way they think about things.



Harnessing the understanding of different media channels, and with the opportunity to introduce print across generational divides, will also be central to the IPIA and Citipost Mail's approach to education about print as a trusted medium, alongside its commitment to bring more young people into the industry as a career option.







### **Dominating** strategies

Madano's data analysis showed there is a clear recognition and acknowledgment of the dominance of digital marketing strategies where cost effectiveness, targeted reach and measurable outcomes show that digital channels are perceived as outperforming print. This has resulted in digital marketing putting areas such as traditional print advertising into decline versus SEO, PPC, social media and other online platforms.

Highlighting the need to engage digital marketers about the potential of print, the IPIA will be focusing on how to deliver a clear message in regard to print's role in effective, measurable communication methods. It will also illustrate how certain sectors have provided a blueprint for communication that effectively articulates the benefits of print that both penetrates and creates impact.

### **Enduring impact on** customer experience

Where Madano's findings revealed challenging perceptions for print, the recognition of its ability to harness detailed information, a tactile experience and evoke emotions, keeps this medium a cornerstone part of how the industry continues to serve the broad spectrum of businesses, end-users and consumers.

The comprehension of why print delivers enhanced customer experience, building trust can be key to improving all important sales conversions. Critical for enhancing brand presence and aiding the maintenance of consumer relationships, print's ability to customise and personalise creates a place for print in the digitally dominated landscape.

This is not to say that a print only strategy is the most impactful or even desired. A skilful combination of channels can deliver maximum impact and ROI. When print is involved, wider research shows marketing mix modelling, where three or more channels are involved, can increase return on investment by as much as 56%.

# Print as a sustainable resource

Coupled with evidence on effectiveness and the accurate sustainability story about print, there is clear evidence of the gap between the perception of the print industry and its reality, and why 'A New Narrative for Print' is such a critical endeavour to address this issue.

The role print has in sustainability has long been highlighted as a contributor to climate change, seen as a complex supply chain and steep carbon footprint. With managed paper supplies and traceability of stocks, the position for paper's role in the global supply chain has changed. Despite that fact, 60% of European consumers believe Europe's forests are shrinking, they have in fact grown, representing 28 billion m³ and growing by 612 million m³ annually.

With European forests acting as a major carbon sink, how and why we recycle has also been under scrutiny. Carbon sequestration corresponds to around 10% of gross greenhouse emissions.<sup>5</sup>

Only 18% of EU consumers understand paper and paper-based package can be recycled, which shows there is more work to be done to educate about the merits and benefits of the sustainable loop for paper. Currently, Europe is the world leader in recycling, boasting that 79% of the paper collected in  $2023^7$  was recycled.

When we consider everyday actions such as 'switching to paperless', there is an apparent link between sustainability and action. 55% consumers surveyed understood this action was in fact more about a cost saving than saving the environment, with 53% stating they also then printed off a digital document at home, creating a misnomer.

With a distinct shift in trust generationally, and knowing at least 56% have concerns about personal information being held digitally, print represents a sustainable way to hold and process records – even alongside a digital counterpart.

Understanding the attention print commands, and its effective use to both communicate and have a role in the sustainable future of our planet, the industry will need to continue to find solutions to highlight and overcome the negative perception of our sector's sustainability.

It is the IPIA and Citipost Mail's belief 'A New Narrative for Print' is one of those solutions.



<sup>6</sup> Two Sides/Toluna Research (2023)





<sup>7</sup> Cepi: Key Statistics (2023)



# Case Study Life Extending Stickers

A recent campaign which harnessed the traditional role of printed stickers on fruit and vegetables to reduce wastage is a clear case in point when it comes to the effective use of print to shift consumer perceptions and stimulate positive action.

Colour coded to demonstrate the stages of ripeness, each sticker was tailored to produce, showing consumers how fruit and vegetables were still good even if the colour of the skins had changed – and importantly suggestions on how to use the ripe produce. With 40% of fruit and vegetables going to waste, the general perception was 'too ripe is wrong'. The campaign, *Life Extending Stickers/Makro/Grey Advertising*, won an Ad Net Zero Grand Prix International Award in 2023, championing the role of print to speak directly to consumers in a relevant setting, with a simple replicable activation of an obvious but forgotten truth.

Printed as a classic 'fruit label' size of 2.7cm, the colour coded stickers showed recipes linked to ripeness, extending shelf life by as much as six days.

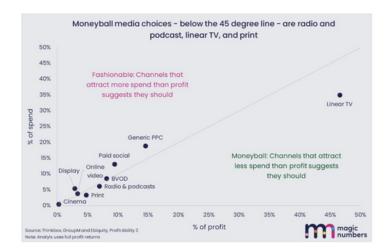


This campaign reduced food waste by as much as 70 tonnes weekly through grocery retail and home combined, just with the use of a printed sticker.

# Digital: a fashionable choice; not always the profitable choice

In a post-Covid era, many marketers have reassessed their media choices, and recent studies looked at the true benefit of a range of channels including print media.

The study specifically examined those media channels in 'fashion' and those which are underutilised.



Across the spectrum of where print has impact, print media has seen a sharp decline in favour of digital channels. The report, which draws from a range of source data, has shown a number of channels including print attracts less spend than profit suggests they should (based on full profit returns), with certain channels such as PPC, paid social and digital display securing more spend – despite showing less profitable outcomes.

Print can be represented here as an extreme example; 63% of the businesses studied had already dropped print from their plans. Only those who measured a very high return on investment (ROI) continued to invest in print. Even with print showing middle to high ROI, print was still dropped from plans.

In a digitally dominant world, communication plans which include print with a relevant audience, are more likely to see a greater ROI when re-adopting print, particularly for those B2B and B2C audiences who are rediscovering the impact of print in the sea of digital noise.

This represents an opportunity waiting to be capitalised on for the savvy marketer.

Discovering the imbalance of overspend and over reliance in online channels, this study showed clearly those who were prepared to go against the 'fashionable grain' potentially stood to engage audiences in different ways.



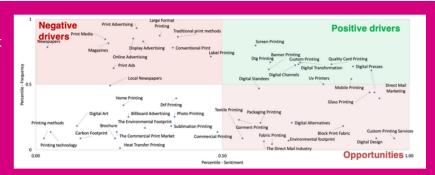




# Setting the scene for meaningful research

The findings from the wider research highlighted in this paper correlates strongly with the data and analysis generated by Madano. This demonstrates there is a clear need for a cohesive, sustainable and long-term campaign to promote the strengths of print and its effectiveness as a marketing and communications medium.

Working with Madano and its project partners, the IPIA set out to explore fundamental questions about what was influencing and motivating businesses in their choices of communication and marketing channels.



This included a view of mainstream media, encompassing email, social, websites, radio, TVCs, direct response television (DRTV) and print within this mix.

Digging into the views which matter to those taking and making decisions; effectiveness, sustainability, trust in content in comparison to digital and its measurability allowed an insight into the conversations outside the ears of the print industry – which are influencing the investment into the print sector overall. The research also captured the perception of using print within a multi-channel marketing and communications strategy.

Data was collected across a range of media; online news, Reddit, forums, blogs, X (Twitter), YouTube alongside other government sources from Parliamentary speeches. Using key terms related to print such as effectiveness as a marketing and communications medium, sustainability of print, more than 12,000 pieces of online media content over a consecutive twelve-month period between May 2023 and May 2024 were consolidated.

The data was analysed and qualitatively assessed in clusters to understand more about in-depth conversations surrounding types and methods of print, overlaid with additional novel Al-driven approaches to analysing sentiment and meaning. This ensured that relevant, print related terms were focused on and refined before being output into a ranking score, representing how positively print was being discussed by sentiment and frequency, revealing significant and actionable insights.







How far do conversations go?

The print sector generates content about innovation, progress, sustainability and reasons to use print in prolific amounts. Shouting to anyone who will listen that print will deliver solutions, the research findings however clearly pointed to the 'echo chamber' print industry content is sitting in.

The industry strives to promote and protect print, yet this can be seen as a defensive position - particularly when this content is superseded by those weighing up effectiveness, sustainability and complexity. The data analysis also clearly proved that the positive content being generated by the print industry isn't going far or deep enough to cut through and reach decision makers in potential print buying sectors.



Conversations on X (Twitter), showed the high frequency of print related topics and the lack of visibility with the target audience.

Where penetration increased, it was in sectors with highly engaged communities, which include photography, screen printing and design. Assessing the impact in other digital mediums (forums, blogs), graphic design showed growing engagement with debates involving print vs digital.





# Challenging perceptions

Print does represent a choice to opt for with a positive view on economic payback and its accessibility. There is however an overriding perception the cost and convenience of print was more challenging, leading to a negative view.

The unique benefits of print; aesthetics, experience, authenticity and trust attracted supportive dialogue, but were overshadowed by the perceived expense of using print and its complexity as a medium.

While much of the conversation about print is supportive, the majority of the discussion is centred on perceived points of challenge (cost / convenience) rather than print's unique benefits: aesthetics, experience, authenticity and trust.

High-level topic mentions\* and sentiment discussed across media sources



When considering the vast volume of discussions online about marketing, it is no surprise to hear digital dominated search terms, outstripping searches for print by 195% on Google alone. There is less attention on print from a proactive search and volume of content, echoing the sentiment of print as a medium, which is not observed at the same levels as digital marketing.





# Innovation sparks engagement

Examining the conversations online across media and forums revealed an engaged audience exploring innovative technologies from this sector.

Often cited from the industry that 'print *is* digital', opportunities were found in textile, packaging, apparel print, direct mail and personalisation where digital innovation in print aided seamless production and results.



This is not 'new news' to the print sector, but shows the discovery and exploration from other sectors, where positive drivers also picked up large-format and digital print.



## **Engaged** communities

Engaged communities online also drive positive topics such as screen print.

Understanding why a theme such as screen print stood out was linked to the positive volume of discussion and content which transcended beyond the immediate print industry, creating memorable impact.

Using the example of screen print, this medium was also attributed to several different items such as promotional print or large orders. Screen print has been pivotal for sectors such as design, illustration and textiles, enriching fashion and sustainability – providing an expression of artistry and capturing culture.

Screen printing is costeffective for large orders, while digital printing allows for intricate designs with no minimum order requirements

Conversation extract: social media





Screen printing is a costeffective method for simpler designs, often used by businesses for promotional bags

Conversation extract: social media

Pairing materials and design has helped realise design in context; whether it's originating a design on sustainable materials or opting for screen print as a method which reduces waste, those supporting screen print are vocal about this print medium delivering solutions. Looking to larger formats such as banner or fabric printing, these were also recognised as cost-effective forms of promotion.





### **Being direct**

In recent years, the value and perception of direct mail has also seen a larger scale re-engagement as a channel. With less post and general printed material, direct mail has created new space amongst its digital counterparts as businesses seek to gain greater penetration and traction.

The IPIA research showed a 90% positive sentiment towards direct mail, citing examples where higher response rates were recorded vs purely digital campaigns. This was particular positivity around the utilisation of high-quality digital data to precisely target consumers and personalise campaigns.



Negative sentiment from the research was focused on traditional media channels, which are currently seen as declining; these included print media, magazines, and newspapers. There has been some resurgence of traditional print media in these areas. It has been deliberately chosen to champion print to demonstrate a clear point of difference against a digital channel to promote the look and feel of brand propositions.

It is understandable to see some decline in print media and print advertising as digital methods appear superior in measurement, accessibility and providing a clearer return on investment (ROI).

This is also linked to the way younger audiences consume media in general, opting for different ways to curate their news and information feeds. Coupled with the view of a less flexible or effective method, where large volumes are required, there is an opportunity to challenge this misconception.

Strategically executed direct mail marketing strategy campaigns also boast higher response rates compared to purely digital campaigns

Conversation extract: social media



The research also identified growth opportunities, and the indepth cluster analysis helped the IPIA isolate immediate areas of effort where the industry could focus. With an emphasis on sustainability, digital printing was hailed for a cost effective, simpler, fuss free approach and how this method of print will support cost and waste reduction.

With repeated references throughout the findings of cost and complexity representing significant barriers, the advances in digital print methods are where the industry must continue to highlight these innovations in the right context, reframing and challenging the established view.

## Opportunities to lead the sector

Textile printing has also undergone many changes in recent years, reflected in the transformation in the sector of different methods, in wide-format print in particular. The developments in water-based inks, increased print speed and print mark definition, is producing incredible high quality, often on demand, textile print.

Inspiring a new generation of designers with what is possible in this medium to achieve greater clarity and definition in their designs, the innovations in this sector will see textiles as an expanding segment in the print industry.

In a trend seen emerging in a rejection of 'digital only' formats – where complex information or detailed content was presented – printed brochures or similar formats presented improved experience to consume content.

Where ROI is under scrutiny, printed materials cost per unit vs other channels also gave marketers and businesses reasons to explore the marketing method.

This insight also demonstrated the lack of awareness across the marketing disciplines and how profitable mediums were potentially being overlooked in favour of other more popular channels.





# Planning a communications strategy to include print

Effectiveness is everything when it comes to planning an impactful communication strategy from agreed marketing plans. Building print into the mix presents many marketers with a dilemma. Resource heavy and carrying a perceived high-cost outlay when compared to online options, marketers can be forgiven for selecting alternatives to print.

Couple the cost arguments with audience preference for digital or social especially with audiences under 30 where marketing communications are generally served as digital, there are negative perceptions about the relevance of print versus digital and social media. Reflecting on the 'fashionable' channels where print is excluded in favour of digital, there are numerous challenges to the view that print remains an effective medium without clear evidence and a trend to pick this media choice in the industry.

Building credibility with audiences in the digital age remains paramount. With trust identified as a key issue across the generations, printed materials are seen as trustworthy and credible when compared to digital advertising.

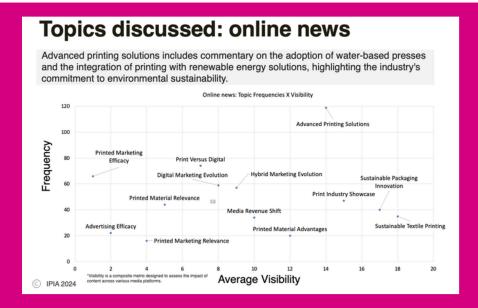
Whilst ROI dominates conversations linked to the prevalent view of expense, there is strong evidence to show the physical interaction leads to a connected experience, which digital simply cannot replicate. By providing undivided attention, bringing print into the balance of communication strategies can and will enhance effectiveness.





# Resourcing sustainably

There is no doubt the emerging and evolving discourse surrounding sustainable best practice does not always accurately reflect print.



Perceptions of resource intense methods of production and processes are being offset by modern print methods, which are reducing resources and waste.

This 'best kept secret' is a prime example of the education and information that needs to reach decision makers and influencers. With carbon and environmental impacts involving lower water consumption, reduced emissions and energy, print when compared with some digital outputs results in far less damage to the planet.

By promoting responsible production methods and already meeting known environmental standards, the print sector can stand shoulder to shoulder with other creative and manufacturing industries on the sustainable future of print.





# The rise and rise of digital media: what has print got to do with it?

Print takes effort, planning and commitment to the content. As an example, 82% of millennials express a higher level of trust in printed marketing materials when compared to their digital counterparts.

Leading to increased message retention and brand recall, print plays its part to influence consumer behaviour and loyalty over time. We are exposed to on average over 5,000 advertising and marketing messages daily. Research shows our brains are then more likely to only process short term messages, leading to diluted message efficacy.

The integration of print and digital marketing strategies has also been shown to improve campaign effectiveness, with evidence of higher response rates, consumer action and converting intent. As with textiles, print based advertising can reach niche, growing audiences where print is the compelling presence. Complementing digital efforts, messages can receive more focused attention and embed brand recall.





### Understanding the perception of using print in a multi-channel marketing strategy

The desire to connect with the world around us physically and not just digitally means the case to address the fleeting nature of communication with emotional permanence holds core and unequivocal truths. For campaigns to be truly effective and deliver the holy grail of ROI – recall and repeat purchase over an extended period - print is a magic ingredient.

We are, by nature, conscious in our consummation of the media around us. We want to trust and the communication we see and feel. Globally, the annual Edelman Trust Barometer points to a cycle of distrust where media is seen as unethical and incompetent. To go beyond this and create connection, the print industry is in a powerful place of opportunity for the future.

Industry strategy gurus Les Binet and Peter Field have long argued an emotional connection with the consumer through advertising and marketing campaigns are more likely to create long-term profitable growth than employing rational 'left brain' messages.

Measuring emotion is an essential part of how a brand, product or service performs. Print provides the perfect platform to drive an emotional response, creating memory and resonating with the receiver. We know brands using physical mediums in their campaigns can gain as much as 75% intent to purchase and onward recommendation to others.

For marketers whose strategies are driven by online, using short-term digital dialogues to communicate openness and availability may have saved budgets and kept brands selling in recent years. In the bombarded digital world, we need a full sensory experience that drives both the right and left sides of our brain, creating permanent connections. This is the role of print; fostering relationships, trust and generating a long-term bond with the receiver.

The research generated by Madano and guided by the IPIA and its partners such as Citipost Mail, has told us that print made things happen, disrupting thought and driving action, focusing hearts and minds, creating clarity, establishing critical thinking or representing artistry. Creating the conversation about print across the myriad of print-connected industries represents opportunities for the industry, armed with insight and purpose to build a new, refreshed presence and a renewed reason to believe in the power of print.

We have shown the way forward is to clarify the role print plays across different sectors, helping provide effective communication, resources, realising designs and creativity. We need to go out to our market and declare why print is critical.



## Influencing the conversation

The IPIA has used the findings to determine the origin and influence behind key streams of opinion and dialogue surrounding the use and implementation of print strategies. Using Madano's AI and data science tools to establish the origin of those behind key streams of views and dialogue, 50 highly influential individuals have been identified shaping marketing, design, trends and communication.

Using a strategic approach with fifty selected influencers hailing from the marketing, advertising, media and design sectors, the next chapter of the new narrative of print will embrace the insights generated by the research and bring forward positive conversations to help change the direction and perception of print.

By engaging with those at the source of shaping opinion and positively channelling the knowledge flowing from them to willing ears and eyes, we can create a cascade effect to those making choices about the medium of print, furnishing those decision-makers with critical information – creating a tipping point for the place of print.

The study's findings have now equipped the IPIA and its partners with the knowledge needed to develop a series of positive narratives to tell the story of print's effectiveness, sustainability and beneficial impact on culture, society and the arts.





A New Narrative for Print is a crucial step in understanding the dynamics of our industry.

By identifying the key influencers and the narratives they are driving, we can also better position ourselves as an industry to respond to challenges and seize opportunities.

The insights from this research will be instrumental in guiding our strategies and ensuring the continued relevance and growth of print.



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### A NEW NARRATIVE FOR PRINT



